

What They're Saying

Letters, editorials, and news articles on
the need to improve high school
graduation requirements in Michigan

The Education Alliance of Michigan

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October 5, 2005

Mr. Mike Flanagan
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 30008
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Superintendent Flanagan:

Members of the Alliance have met with experts who have a global view of education models and have reviewed the Michigan data regarding preparedness of our students to be successful in our new flat-world economy.


The Education Alliance of Michigan strongly supports a state required course of study to prepare students for postsecondary success and readiness for the world of work (for example: four years of grade-level English including literature, writing, reasoning, logic and communication skills; four years of math, including Algebra I and II, geometry, data analysis, and statistics; and increased rigor for science, social studies and other areas).

The state should develop high school standards that clearly describe the knowledge and skills and the level of rigor expected of required courses to ensure that educators and the public have a common understanding of what is essential for students to learn. These standards should be aligned with the K-8 Grade Level Content Expectations and the knowledge and skills required for college and workplace success.

The Education Alliance of Michigan expresses a strong sense of urgency that an action plan be developed, which identifies the issues and timelines that should be addressed to develop the required course of study.

The Education Alliance of Michigan is committed to enhancing student achievement by working cooperatively to remove the obstacles to student success. The Education Alliance provides a forum to exchange ideas and develop education policy that will improve the design and delivery of education at all levels from infancy through adulthood. The success of the Alliance has been the ability of its members to reach consensus on education issues, so members can provide leadership to their individual constituencies as well as political leaders and the public.

Respectfully,


Jim Ballard, Alliance Chair
Executive Director
Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals



MASSP

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Mark Thomas, President
Jim Ballard, Executive Director

November 15, 2005

Dear Colleague:

This morning State Superintendent of Schools, Mike Flanagan, is publicly presenting his high school graduation requirement recommendations to the State Board of Education. I was fortunate to represent the MASSP on a task force that conducted research and provided data to assist the superintendent in formulating his proposal. After reading this fax and studying the recommendations more closely, I would invite you to join me in supporting Superintendent Flanagan's efforts. This is not a RADICAL proposal – it is a RESPONSIBLE one! As an Association we need to be leaders in improving our P-16 system!

Without question, there is a body of research and data that tells us what is best for the academic preparation of our children. We also are aware of the 21st century skills our children will need to thrive both personally and professionally. The Superintendent's proposal addresses these areas while still taking into account the biggest hot button in the looming debate – local control. These recommendations respect the need for and history of local control but also take steps to insure that all children, regardless of zip code, will have access to a foundation curriculum that better prepares them for successful futures. Michigan's educational data reflects that while some of our kids are doing well, there are obvious gaps/differences in our K-16 curriculum that are negatively affecting student achievement. This plan speaks to Michigan's need to align our standards and benchmarks across the state at the high school level.

In one respect our society designed a similar solution long ago. Medical research taught us that we could improve the health of individual children, as well as the health of the community as a whole, and also reduce potential medical costs by requiring immunizations. Please think of this proposal as an "educational and intellectual" immunization for all of our children. It is the same principle. A child can still see their family doctor (local district) to be treated, but if any of them lack the means for any reason, free medical care and immunizations will be provided. All of Michigan's children currently have access to immunizations and in the same respect they should have equal access to a curriculum that promises hope for their futures.

I respect that we all have different situations in our schools and communities and this proposal may create some challenges. I hope all of you can appreciate that the Superintendent is shouldering the responsibility by suggesting a mandate that allows us to affect positive change for our students. Our master schedules and programs need to be about the children and not the adults. This proposal helps us as leaders reinforce that philosophy.

Today is kickoff and the political game has just begun. Remember, many times the political process loses sight of the kids and focuses on the adults. As your President, I will be happy to respond to your questions and concerns. My email and school phone are listed below. Please keep up the good work by continuing to advocate for our kids and colleagues.

Respectfully,

Mark Thomas, MASSP President

E-Mail: mthomas@nvps.net

School Phone Number: 616.363.4857



Everything Michigan

Column: Hopefully Michigan students can read economic writing on the wall

Sunday, November 27, 2005

By Peter Luke

Delphi CEO Steve Miller laid out what Michigan's middle class means in a global economy. State schools chief Michael Flanagan laid out what needs to be done to keep future middle classes in the middle.

Middle, by traditional definition in this state, isn't \$12.50 an hour. That's Miller's current offer to thousands of workers now earning more than double that. Miller told the Detroit News last week that the average wage for parts workers in regions where Delphi has factories is about \$12 an hour.

"They are people I regard as the middle class -- manufacturing workers throughout the eastern United States."

That works out to about \$25,000 a year, which in Michigan won't support a new pickup, a couple of snowmobiles, a small lake cottage or a large travel trailer. In short, a quality of life long sustained by working in a car plant.

Miller isn't redefining the middle class. He's just articulating what has been years in the making: downward pressure on production wages wrought by globalization. The United Auto Workers recognized much the same when two years ago it negotiated a two-tier wage structure that paid new Delphi hires \$10 less per hour.

Lower blue-collar pay scales are a shock to workers, but they should ring an alarm bell for their children and a state that's supposed to be looking out for them.

Flanagan said as much this month by calling for tougher high school graduation standards and a mandatory core curriculum.

"The mind-set has to be urgent to get this done," Flanagan told the State Board of Education, which will likely approve his proposal in two weeks.

Said Flanagan: "The perfect storm is heading toward Michigan -- the pressures of the global economy that our current system is not set up for, and the belief that the old auto industry will come back and everything will be fine just the way things were."

The proposal calls for four years of math, including Algebra II; four years of science, including chemistry; three years of social science, including a semester of economics; and one year each of physical education and fine arts.

There are questions, however. How much flexibility will schools have in delivering this new curriculum? Should students who excel in language arts but find Algebra I torture be force fed Algebra II? As high school graduates are taking remedial courses in college, will middle school students need remediation to handle a tougher high school load?

Assuming Michigan high school students can't handle that tougher load sets the bar too low. But what teacher preparation and tutoring resources will be available to reach students who fear that bar as being set too high?

Still, Flanagan's curriculum changes recognize two facts.

One is that low-skilled production work doesn't pay any more so it behooves Michigan's children to attain a college degree, two years or four. The second is that Michigan high schools aren't adequately preparing students to do college work.

Those facts aren't new. But for years the state fostered the illusion that a high school education is sufficient for financially sustainable work by requiring so little of students: three years of social science.

What high school has to do is direct more students to a successful college education that provides a transferable set of skills. Preferably skills in a profession or trade that can't be outsourced to countries with wages that are driving down pay in Michigan.

Twelve bucks an hour translates to \$9 take-home. Hours of work per month to make payment on a new Chevy Silverado? About 40. To make the monthly payment on a starter home? Try 80.

To kids who assume they're going to be able to make money and buy the stuff they want by working in a parts plant, Miller is saying think again.

To kids who are or will be confronting what is the new economic reality, Flanagan is saying, simply, that it's time to think.

Contact Peter Luke at (517) 487-8888 or e-mail him at pluke@boothnewspapers.com.

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Sunday, November 20, 2005

Tough state curriculum demands qualified teachers

Districts must put qualifications ahead of seniority

The Detroit News

The State Board of Education took a courageous and aggressive step toward pulling Michigan out of its economic crisis by proposing a rigorous curriculum for all high school students.

Now it needs to make sure that those teaching the new classes are qualified in the subjects.

Michigan is making good progress toward the federal No Child Left Behind Act June deadline for all teachers to be highly qualified in their core subjects. About 94 percent of state teachers meet that mark.

But loose school district practices regarding teacher placement present a roadblock to guaranteeing that those teachers are actually teaching the courses they are trained for.

If that doesn't change, the new curriculum rules will have less impact.

Although state law requires downsizing districts not to assign unqualified teachers to classes they shouldn't teach, the norm in Michigan is for straight seniority layoffs.

That means that too often English and history teachers end up in math and science classrooms.

While they may be fine teachers, if math and science are not their core competencies, they won't help students pass the new curriculum requirements.

School districts must put educating students ahead of teacher seniority.

Math and science teachers should be the last laid off in districts where those instructors are in short supply. And that's most districts.

Statewide, more math and science teachers are needed, and the demand

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Highly qualified teacher rules

To be rated highly qualified under federal rules, a teacher must:

- Have a bachelor's degree.
- Have full state certification.
- Prove that they know each subject they teach.
- Proof of knowing a subject includes advanced certification from the state; a graduate degree; a college major in the subject; passage of a state subject matter test; college credits equivalent to a major; passing an alternative test (for teachers of several subjects).

Source: U.S. Department of Education

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will only grow if the new curriculum is adopted.

But those trained in math and science often have more lucrative career options than education.

Districts must be prepared to pay more to attract math and science teachers. That means changing union contracts and reordering budget priorities.

Teaching should not be the only profession held immune from market forces. In the private sector, workers who are in the highest demand command the highest pay.

Likewise, the best-performing employees usually are better compensated in most workplaces.

Denver teachers recently amended their contract to allow merit bonuses to instructors who meet subjective performance measures.

That will encourage highly motivated teachers to stay in the profession, rather than seek other opportunities where their growth is not so limited.

The education revolution that is needed to prepare Michigan's work force for the jobs of the knowledge economy will demand many bold steps.

The school board is off to a good start with the new curriculum requirements. But to assure the classes work, the board must also make sure qualified teachers are always in the classrooms.

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Proposed tough curriculum will better prepare students

Required high school credits would jump from 1 to 16

The Detroit News

The Michigan Department of Education is shifting into a higher gear to make sure state students are prepared to compete in the new knowledge economy.

Proposed state curriculum reforms are welcome and overdue. They promise to better prepare students for college or other education needed to land a decent-paying job.

Reforms would increase state requirements for graduation from one to 16 credits, ending a patchwork of requirements that varied from district to district.

State action is needed because too many districts are graduating students who are unprepared to do much of anything after high school.

Currently, the state requires only one high school civics course. Reforms under consideration would change that to four credits of math, four of English, three social studies, three science, one health education and one fine arts or music.

Final rules should make sure the social studies requirement includes a healthy dose of U.S. history and government. One study found that -- without such a grounding -- the country is in danger of becoming a democracy without citizens.

Three criticisms of the curriculum plan don't hold much water:

- The reforms trample local control. Not really. It is, after all, the state that requires public education. So the state can also set bare-minimum requirements for graduation.
- The reforms amount to "unfunded mandates." The state already spends \$13 billion a year on public education. Lawmakers are certainly entitled to demand a return on the investment.

If need be, the spending rules can be changed. That is, the state's \$13 billion can be partly earmarked to cover the new 16-credit graduation requirement, meaning the new rules are funded.

No extra funding is needed to implement the plan. It's something districts should have been doing all along.

- Fewer students will graduate. It's a backward argument. What's the point of graduating students who haven't learned essential skills?

The reforms will take a lot of heat. But lawmakers shouldn't flinch in requiring such basics from all students who get a high school diploma in Michigan.

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Not ready for college

Three-quarters of Michigan's high school graduates are not likely to be ready for college-level work.

Subject	Score*	Percentage meeting score or better
English composition	18	70%
Algebra	22	45
Social sciences	21	55
Biology	24	32
Students meeting all benchmark scores		25

*College-ready score out of 36 points

Source: ACT

The Detroit News

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Graduation requirements

The percentage of school districts and charter schools that require this course for high school graduation:

LANGUAGE ARTS

English 1
73.4%

English 2
70.6%

English 3
60.7%

English 4
37.2%

Writing/composition
13.0%

MATHEMATICS

Algebra I
32.4%

Geometry
23.2%

Algebra 2
11.6%

SCIENCE

Biology
46.1%

Chemistry
10.2%

Physics
6.1%

SOCIAL STUDIES

American history
78.2%

Government
76.8%

Economics
58.7%

World history
33.4%

ARTS

Some art requirement
43.4%

WORLD LANGUAGES

Some foreign language requirement
11.6%

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Note: 45% or 293 of the state's 569 school districts and 78 charter schools responded to the survey.

Source: Michigan Department of Education

The Detroit News

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Sunday, November 20, 2005

Derailing tougher courses will doom state to serfdom

By Nolan Finley / The Detroit News



If the foes lining up against the tough, mandatory curriculum proposed by the state Board of Education

prevail, Michigan's high schools might as well pass out brooms and aprons to their graduates, instead of diplomas.

The new curriculum's ability to muster the political support it needs to become law will be a test of whether the residents of this state have awakened to the fact that the global economy has left them behind.

In Lansing and on local school boards, ostriches are declaring the tougher standards dead on arrival. If that's true, put the tag on Michigan's toe, too.

The only way out of the state's economic crisis is rapidly preparing the work force for the jobs of the 21st century. Those jobs demand more skills than are currently being taught in state high schools, which can shape their course requirements any way they please.

Shake off laziness

Only one-third of districts require a basic algebra class. That helps explain why fewer than 25 percent of Michigan's college-bound high school graduates have taken the courses necessary to prepare them for college, and why half of those who start college drop out.

The state's proposed curriculum demands 16 specific courses -- half of them in math and science, reflecting the reality that most of today's good jobs are built on these skills.

It will make high school more difficult, and more students will struggle, particularly at first.

But sticking to the lazy style of schooling will see our children carrying the bags of the children of China, India and Eastern Europe, where parents aren't whining about education standards being too high -- they're demanding they be higher.

The arrogant, entitlement mentality that still poisons Michigan maintains that our children should expect to live better than the rest of the world without working as hard. Those days are long gone.

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Today's diplomas worthless

Today, the threshold for success is no longer a high school diploma. Even the jobs in the new automotive plants require some level of post-secondary training.

Parents who object to the tougher standards because they'll mean more homework and perhaps lower grade-point averages may as well keep their children at home.

They'll be no worse off without a high school diploma than with one that has prepared them for nothing.

Similarly, educators who complain about the extra workload ought to get out of the business. If their only goal is to move kids from ninth grade to 12th grade and then out the door, babysitters could do that job just as well and cheaper.

Fewer than 20 percent of today's high school freshmen will graduate from college. That won't cut it for a state that pretends to be striving for a high-tech future, and it's a poor return on a \$13 billion investment in public education.

If we let weak politicians derail the tougher curriculum, we'll seal Michigan's fate as the state that produces the world's best floor sweepers and hamburger flippers.

Nolan Finley is The Detroit News' editorial page editor. Reach him at 313-222-2064 or nfinley@detnews.com.

Nolan Finley is The Detroit News' editorial page editor. Reach him at 313-222-2064 or nfinley@detnews.com. Watch Nolan Finley at 8:30 p.m. Fridays on "Am I Right?" on Detroit Public Television, Channel 56. Watch Nolan Finley at 8:30 p.m. Fridays on "Am I Right?" on Detroit Public Television, Channel 56.

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Friday, November 18, 2005

Put aside partisan bickering, raise graduation requirements

By Frank Beckmann / Special to The Detroit News



The political climate has produced politicians who do a disservice to "The Greatest

Generation," those heroes of the World War II era. Our modern-day leaders are more concerned with the next election cycle than what our country will look like 200 years from now.

This insight comes from former GOP Oklahoma Congressman J.C. Watts in an address several weeks ago to the Student Statesmanship Institute of Michigan.

Watts' remarks are spot on not only with senators and congressmen but our local leaders as well.

We are in the midst of one of the most sordid and divisive periods in Michigan political history, and one wonders if any of those involved truly recognize the damage they may be doing to our future.

We're coming off a Detroit mayoral campaign that included contemptible race baiting.

We witnessed the controversy of questionable absentee ballots with state and county receivers appointed to insure that legitimate voters weren't disenfranchised.

In recent weeks, the unseemly Geoffrey Fieger-Mike Cox scandal engulfed the headlines while Detroit City Council member Lonnie Bates was indicted.

And in Lansing -- with our state's sad economy begging for attention -- our governor and legislative leaders haggled over the fate of a business tax reform bill, leaving it mired in the quicksand of political mumbo-jumbo while both Democrats and Republicans eyed a political edge for the 2006 gubernatorial election.

This cheerless backdrop has overshadowed a true visionary who is emerging on the state scene. I think Watts would approve of the foresight of State Superintendent of Instruction Michael Flanagan.

While the headlines scream of shame and political one-upmanship, Flanagan has put together a creative plan to ensure that our children have a better chance to succeed once they leave high school. Flanagan is to be congratulated for recommending much stiffer high school graduation requirements for state students, who in the past were expected to receive credit only in civics as a prerequisite for graduation.

The superintendent's plan, received warmly by the State Board of

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Education this week, mandates 16 credits in English, math, science, social studies and arts/music. Flanagan's vision will require a greater effort by students to place academics ahead of extracurricular activities, and it will make Michigan's high school graduates of the future much more qualified and prepared to face the real world of job demands.

"The perfect storm has formed," Flanagan told me this week. "Part of it is this global economy that's knocking our socks off, but in addition to that is this whole idea that it's going to get better and you don't need an education, and we'll just get jobs on the line. ... We'll have a place up north and we'll have a nice car. These kids are being sold a pipe dream. ... They need to have higher order math and science even to just work on the modern line."

Flanagan's design makes so much sense that it would seem to be a no-brainer for implementation by the 2006 school year. But the state board needs to approve it, and then it goes to the Legislature and governor, with potential approval by next spring.

Let's hope they take off the blinders of the next election cycle and swiftly endorse this impressive plan to aid children of both Democrats and Republicans for many years to come.

Frank Beckmann is host of "The Frank Beckmann Show" on WJR (760 AM) from 9-11:30 a.m. Monday-Friday. E-mail letters to letters@detnews.com.

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Education First

Michigan must improve value of diploma

November 17, 2005

In his first major act since becoming state schools superintendent, Mike Flanagan is trying to demolish one of the biggest barriers to strengthening education in Michigan: ridiculously low expectations of high school students.

Flanagan's remedy -- tougher, broader, statewide requirements to graduate from high school -- is an overdue dose of common sense.

The superintendent wants to ensure that a diploma from any school in Michigan has value and that all have equal value, providing an adequate foundation for graduates to function in this increasingly demanding world.

If his proposal becomes law, as it should, all students would have to complete four years of math, four years of English, three years of science, three years of social studies and a year each of art and physical education.

The State Board of Education, expected to vote on the proposal next month, ought to consider adding a foreign-language requirement. Globalization, remember? It's real and irreversible.

Michigan students must be prepared to compete at home and around the world, which means acquiring the ability to communicate rather than simply expecting the world to learn English.

It is true that many Michigan school districts already have moved to tougher graduation requirements without a state edict. But not enough, and there is no guarantee that a student in Plymouth-Canton is being challenged as much as one in Gaylord or Detroit.

Statewide equity in education remains an important goal that has not yet been achieved, despite the promise of the Proposal A financial reforms. Flanagan's plan can be an important new pillar in the foundation of an equitable system.

The state Legislature must continue to work, though, on the financing to make this guarantee a reality. That was part of Proposal A's promise, too, as the major burden of school financing was shifted from local property taxes to the state sales tax.

The state must assure that every school district has the resources for the teachers and training to meet the new standards. This cannot be another unfunded mandate.

That's not liberal thinking. It is Michigan law, as laid out in the voter-approved Headlee Amendment.

Given the shape the state budget is in, money surely will be an issue as this plan goes forward. But the

state cannot afford to let it become an obstacle to enacting standards that are sorely needed if Michigan is to go forward.

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WEDNESDAY

NOV. 16, 2005 | METRO FINAL ♦ †



ROCHELLE RILEY

Getting smart about school

Sometimes we don't know just how much work we have cut out for us here in Michigan until someone comes along and points it out.

Thank God for Michael Flanagan.

The state's newest superintendent of education took Gov. Jennifer Granholm's mandate to heart and proposed new graduation requirements Tuesday that are, quite frankly, 30 years overdue.

Michigan high school students now must pass only one course, civics, to graduate. Flanagan proposes that they pass 16 classes, including algebra I and II, geometry, English, social studies, science, health education and at least one credit of either fine arts or music.

My three biggest questions: Why did it take so long? Will the new standards reduce what colleges spend on freshman remediation? Will this put an end to "integrated math"?

In the global game

Want answers? First, Michigan must do all it can to end what Flanagan called an "auto factory mind-set" that keeps the state lagging behind the rest of the country and is the reason it has taken so long to improve education.

"As a civics-only state, we're being left in the global dust," Flana-

gan said in news reports this week. "In today's marketplace, you need an associate's degree just to work at the Cadillac plant down the street. The game has changed, it's a global game, and Michigan

needs to change with it. We're going to be a backwoods state soon if we don't do this."

Second, ensuring that all students meet certain standards could mean that fewer universities may need to develop classes and programs to bring up to speed students whose districts' standards are lower than others.

Third, the Flanagan plan uses up 16 of the 24 credits that students typically need to graduate. So there is room for photography and dance and Spanish. (Maybe Flanagan should have included a language.)

But more important, it could rid the state of integrated math, a way of teaching math concepts (through practical problems) that mixes algebra, geometry, statistics and trigonometry instruction in one class. The class kills several birds with one stone, but ensures that IM students don't get a full year's instruction in algebra, trigonometry or geometry.

Good first step

For years, some students received lesser instruction than others. If you want more college graduates, prepare more students for college.

High school graduation standards are not the only arena in which to fight the damning "auto factory mind-set" trend. But it's a good place to start.

Then, requiring that our high school students know English grammar and how to write the essays that are increasingly being required in testing and for college, should be next.

But that's another column.

ROCHELLE RILEY'S columns are published on Sundays on the *Voices* page and on Wednesdays and Fridays on the *Other Voices* page. Contact her at 313-223-4473 or riley@freepress.com.

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All students must be prepared for college

By Mike Flanagan / Special to The Detroit News

A little three-letter word is posing a big challenge to K-12 education in Michigan today. The word is "all."

"All" as in "all" our students must be prepared to continue their education beyond high school. That central recommendation of the Cherry Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth is a challenge to all of us who are K-12 educators. It gives us a clear goal and asks us to do our part in meeting Gov. Jennifer Granholm's call to double the number of college graduates in Michigan.

The education system we developed in the last century wasn't organized around the idea of "all"; it was built on the idea of "some," and a small "some" at that. We thought only a small fraction of our young people needed to attend college while others could take their place in our economy armed with a high school diploma or, in many cases, no diploma. And our education system reflected those economic realities.

That economy has been replaced by one that runs on knowledge and places a premium on education.

We simply cannot accept the fact that 25 percent of our students don't finish high school. That only a third of those who do graduate have taken the courses that prepare them for college is equally unacceptable.

The study of algebra is a perfect case in point. Mastery of algebra is as important in our age as learning to do arithmetic was in an earlier time. Yet survey results presented to the State Board of Education on Wednesday revealed that only a third of our school districts require their students to take a year of algebra. Little more than 10 percent require students to take Algebra II, the standard most experts in the field recommend.

The necessary fixes

• All high school students in Michigan will take a college entrance exam. Bipartisan legislation, signed by Granholm earlier this year, is replacing the MEAP test with a college entrance exam, the ACT, in the 2006-07 school year. When all students take a college entrance exam,

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some who've never thought about going to college suddenly see themselves as college material.

• **All high school students will master the skills they need to succeed in college and in life.** With other states requiring all students to take rigorous courses, Michigan cannot afford to let each of our 500-plus school districts march in a different direction on high school curriculum. On Nov. 15, I will present my recommendations on a state-mandated core curriculum to the State Board, which is conducting its own examination of what our high school students should learn.

• **All high school students will attend schools that can prepare them for success.** Today many students never find their way in our typical large high schools and instead find themselves on the street without a diploma and without hope. We are working to create small high schools that set high goals for their students and give them the support they need to reach them. The "Digital Learning" High School being created by Apple and the Detroit Public Schools is the first of what will be many small high schools across the state.

• **All high school students who continue their education two years beyond high school will be able to count on a \$4,000 Merit Award scholarship.** The Merit Award we have in Michigan today only helps about half of our high school graduates continue their education. The New Merit Award proposed by Granholm will allow all students who continue their education to demonstrate their "merit" by completing two years of college or comparable technical training. When they do, they'll earn \$4,000 in scholarship support -- enough to pay for a two-year degree at a community college.

Together these policies send a clear message not only to our young people but also to those we hope to attract to Michigan to live, to work and to start a business. Michigan is the state that gives all young people the opportunity and tools they need to succeed in education and in the economy. There is no more important thing we can do to create the Michigan we all want to call home.

Mike Flanagan is the state superintendent of public instruction.

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Everything Michigan

Granholm backs mandated classes for high school

Friday, September 16, 2005 By Judy Putnam

Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Signaling a dramatic shift in education policy, Gov. Jennifer Granholm says she wants to require all public school students to take difficult classes in high school.

The governor, in a radio address today, will call for a mandatory, rigorous high school curriculum.

State law currently requires only a one-semester high school course in civics and government and a one-semester course in health. School boards set the remaining the classes.

"With Michigan's economic future on the line, we can't afford to have our 500 local school districts marching in different directions," the governor said in remarks obtained by Booth Newspapers.

"Instead, we need a high-standards, mandatory curriculum to get all our students on the road to higher education and a good-paying job."

Such statewide graduation requirements could take the form of the courses recommended by the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan. That group recommends four years of math, science, English and social studies, including chemistry, geometry and world history.

Many districts, but not all, already have such standards.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan said an internal work group is studying mandated curriculum in four other states. He said there's a growing consensus among key lawmakers and education groups that mandated curriculum is needed.

"I think it's the first step to much larger numbers of kids graduating with the skills they need to be either work ready or college ready," he said.

Lt. Gov. John Cherry's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth in December recommended that the President Council requirements be used until statewide standards could be set.

Michigan was one of 13 states joining the American Diploma Project in February, sponsored by Achieve, a bipartisan nonprofit group formed by business leaders and governors. The project is aimed at raising the rigor of high school.

Granholm asked the state Board of Education for course recommendations by Nov. 15. She said she will call for legislation to enact them early next year.

The last time the state tried to mandate courses, it backfired under protest from local officials. A mandated core curriculum was approved by lawmakers in 1993, but repealed in 1995, before the core courses went into effect.

This time, education groups appear to be warning to the idea.

Justin King, executive director of the Michigan Association of School Boards, said his board of directors will today consider a report that the state set high school requirements, although he prefers the term "guidelines."

He said MASB opposes strict state mandates because school districts are different and need flexibility.

MASB is the only one of 17 major education groups forming the statewide Education Alliance that hasn't yet endorsed a report recommending a state curriculum, said Jim Ballard, of the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals.

Ballard said high school principals welcome statewide curriculum. He said it will help them encourage parents and students to take classes they must have to get into colleges or training programs.

But some teachers worry that so much concentration on core curriculum won't leave room for electives.

Taking a class in industrial arts, band or choir might be the thing that keeps the student coming to school, said Bill Allender, an industrial arts teacher at Leslie High School.

Flanagan said he, too, is concerned that the mandated core curriculum may not leave room for the arts and career education. He said it's possible to deliver geometry in a building trades course, for example, and there may be some work to decide how that can be counted.

William Schmidt, co-director of the Michigan State University's Education Policy Center, said U.S. students are falling behind their international peers. There are too many choices for young students, he said. Some high schools have up to 40 different courses in math, for example.

"Why do we allow such arbitrariness in requirements for kids? Most of these other countries, the requirements are set, and student's don't have many choices," he said.

He said that parents who think their kids may not be up for what some consider a college prep curriculum should think again.

"If they don't get this, they're going to be seriously handicapped in the future with respect to jobs," he said.

-- Contact Judy Putnam at (517) 487-8888 x232 or e-mail her at jputnam@boothnewspapers.com.

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The Detroit News EXCLUSIVE

16 classes or forget a diploma

■ State wants to require more math, science to get high school students ready for work world.

By MARK HORNBECK
Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING — The state education chief this week will propose a dramatic expansion — from one to 16 — in the number of courses that all Michigan students must pass to graduate from high school.

While the finishing touches are still being put on the tougher statewide curriculum to be delivered to the State Board of Education on Tuesday, state Superintendent Michael Flanagan will recommend something along these lines: four credits of math and language arts or English, three credits of science and

CYBERSURVEY



Should high school standards be tougher? Share your comments at detnews.com/cybersurveys.

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social studies and a credit each of health education and fine arts or music.

Within that framework, Flanagan said, he will call for specific courses of study, such as algebra I, algebra II, geometry, biology, English literature and economics. Students typically need 24 credits to graduate, so they'd still have room for eight credits of electives.

The proposal represents a radical departure from the current

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The Detroit News AND Free Press

Graduation

Continued from Page 1A

statewide mandate, which is only one high school civics class. All other requirements are left up to local districts. Most other states have a far more rigorous set of statewide graduation requirements.

The mandates would have to be approved by the Legislature.

"As a civics-only state, we're being left in the global dust," Flanagan said. "In today's marketplace, you need an associate's degree just to work at the Cadillac plant down the street. The game has changed, it's a global game, and Michigan needs to change with it. We're going to be a backwoods state soon if we don't do this."

He said the state's historic "auto factory mind-set" has put Michigan behind other states in this arena.

"We've always said we don't need those kinds of standards here in Michigan, we can get good jobs in the auto plants without them," he said. "But that's no longer the case. Delphi is the most recent wake-up call."

Flanagan, who predicted "this is the most important thing I will do as state superintendent," will push to get the tougher curriculum in place by the fall of 2006, but said the fall of 2007 is "probably more realistic."

His recommendations promise to touch off a vigorous debate over local control of curriculum and what high-schoolers need to learn to succeed in college and on the job.

The plan is a centerpiece of the Granholm administration's effort to improve basic education, double the state's percentage of college graduates and modernize Michigan's work force.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm called for a tougher set of mandated high school course requirements after an Education Department survey found that local districts aren't doing the job on their own. About one-third of districts require algebra I, for example, and only 12 percent require algebra II, which has become a basic course needed for success in college mathematics. Fewer than half mandate biology while 59 percent require economics and one-third mandate world history.

Lynn Anderson, a parent who has a son at Chippewa Valley High School and a daughter at Sterling Heights High School, said having the state set graduation requirements makes good sense.

"Requirements vary quite a bit from district to district. It's not a bad idea to mandate it statewide so every district is on the same page, requiring the same things of all students," she said. "It's not fair for one child in one district to have an advantage over another child in another district as they get ready to go to college."

Senate Education Committee Chairman Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, said he's never seen a greater consensus among policy makers for toughening the state standards.

"There's no question Michigan is falling behind in terms of students' ability to compete in college and the work force," Kuipers said. "It's appropriate to look at increasing requirements for graduation and it's



Dale G. Young / The Detroit News

Michigan's school Superintendent Mike Flanagan says proposing tougher high school requirements may be his most important task.

important for the state board along with the Legislature to establish content standards for some of those courses so as kids move from district to district the material they're presented will be the same, especially in math and science."

While Flanagan said he'll recommend algebra I and II and geometry be required, he said he'll likely let local districts be more innovative with the science curriculum.

"Science can go beyond just biology, chemistry and physics to areas such as computer science and nanotechnology," he said.

That doesn't mean the state will get involved in mandating certain textbooks or even requiring that concepts be taught in traditional subjects, Flanagan said. Geometry concepts, for example, could be taught in a building trades class as long as the teacher is trained to teach geometry and the district ensures that the subject matter is being taught.

"We can't leave vocational education and career-tech behind," said James McCann, superintendent of Lamphere Schools in Madison Heights. "I'd hate to see a curriculum that deals only with college-bound students because we're not sending 100 percent of kids off to university."

Karen Wixson, professor and former dean of the College of Education at the University of Michigan, said a state-mandated curriculum "is probably needed. We know that differences in achievement levels are a function of opportunity to learn different content. And when things are not required, fewer students take that course, particularly in math and science."

"But if I have any misgivings, it's that I don't want additional requirements to discourage students whose achievement we're trying to improve from staying in school."

David Plank, co-director of the Education Policy Center at Michigan State University, said he doesn't buy the reasoning that more rigorous courses will automatically lead to a higher high school dropout rate.

"That's a pretty sad commentary on the current state of the Michigan education system. We're saying if we ask kids to work hard in school that will cause them to leave school. Do we just want them to stick around and not teach them or challenge them? That's a perverse argument," he said.

Plank, who called the tougher requirements "a good idea," said the state has tried this before but

What the state now requires

- High school civics course
- Proposal being considered by state Supt. Michael Flanagan:
 - 4 math credits (including algebra I and II, and geometry)
 - 4 English or language arts credits
 - 3 social studies credits
 - 3 science credits
 - 1 health education credit
 - 1 fine arts or music credit

slammed into constitutional requirements under the 1978 Headlee Amendment that says the state has to pay for anything it mandates.

Kuipers dismissed that concern. "We're paying at least \$6,700 per student and there's a minimum we

should expect for that," he said. "What do schools think we're giving them money for in the first place?"

Margaret Trimer Hartley, spokeswoman for the Michigan Education Association, said the state's largest teacher's union is inclined to support statewide requirements.

"That every kid doesn't have access to such a rigorous curriculum continues to be Michigan's dark secret," she said. "Studies show that kids who take algebra 2 are more likely to go on to college, period."

"At this point we're hopeful (the high school courses) will be required because we need to see change and we need to see change sooner rather than later."

You can reach Mark Hornbeck at (313) 222-2470 or mhornbeck@detnews.com.



Everything Michigan

A more serious lesson plan

Monday, October 17, 2005

OPINION OF THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Among the lessons of Michigan's lagging economy is that high schools aren't demanding enough of students -- not enough to build futures for them or for this state. A new Lansing report on that point ought to be required reading for every state lawmaker.

The document, put out by the Department of Education and the Michigan Association of School Administrators, describes a state stuck in education yesteryear -- a time when high-paying, lifetime jobs could be had for people with minimal education. Mathematics is a glaring weakness, especially in an ever more technically oriented job market.

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm, who is advocating a mandatory high school curriculum, noted that "Only a third of our school districts even require students to take algebra -- that's simply unacceptable."

Just 14 of 293 school districts responding to the survey are requiring four years of mathematics, a level Gov. Granholm has urged. Ninety-five of the districts required only the most basic level of algebra.

The findings square with reports early this year that a mere 31 percent of Michigan students emerge from high school prepared for college. The schools aren't expecting more and neither is the state: The lone state requirement is that students take a one-semester course in civics.

Lawmakers in the past have resisted the idea of the state compelling more. This newspaper a decade ago was on that side, too, believing that local school boards would step up to the dimensions of a changed economy and push their students to be more serious. But clearly, in too many school districts that local effort hasn't developed. Neither Michigan nor the youngsters can afford a longer wait.



The new curriculum report, which was received last week by the state Board of Education, strengthens the case for state-level reform of high schools. Some schools, of course, already are doing all that is needed. For the many that are not, the proposal being assembled by the board likely will require courses in science, reading, writing and social sciences along with math. Such a regimen would line up high schools with the expectations of colleges, and relieve those colleges of some of the remedial-education chores they now inherit from the K-12 schools.

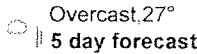
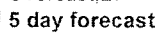

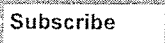
State Superintendent of Public Instruction Michael Flanagan was in Grand Rapids last week trying to promote the state-curriculum idea. He should have plenty of help, including from school boards and from state lawmakers.


"More than any other state," Flanagan said, "we need to change course." Michigan's status as a national unemployment leader has sent that message for several years. Delphi Corp.'s recent bankruptcy filing was more of the same. There is no point in pretending that times haven't changed. They have and school standards must as well.

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Thursday, November 17, 2005

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It's about time for Michigan to study graduation mandates

Web-posted Nov 17, 2005

EDITORIALS

Even now - weeks after it was first revealed - the mind boggles at the fact that the state of Michigan requires just one academic class for high school graduation.

It's civics and that is important, but so are math and science. They're among several disciplines State Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan proposed Tuesday that the Board of Education mandate.

Advertisement

It is hard to believe it won't, but it also is hard to believe this wasn't done years ago. We should take nothing for granted.

Most districts obviously require a sterner curriculum than the state minimum, but too many fall far too short. Only a third require algebra, for example.

We've had about four generations of making as much or more in the traditionally unskilled auto industry jobs than many college graduates earn. But those days are over, and even many auto assembly jobs now require junior college degrees.

The astounding lack of academic standards is only part of the story, however.

We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that not everyone can or should be a so-called knowledge worker. We need some to build things and to fix things. All youngsters should be readied for a productive and self-supporting adulthood, no matter what their aptitudes.

It is as ridiculous to assume they all must obtain academic high school degrees as it has been to assume they essentially need little serious preparation for college courses.

The dropout problem should be eased by offering productive courses of all kinds, not by dumbing down the offerings.

Schools shouldn't expect a larger part of state and local tax dollars to get the job done. They

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simply need to make sure all of the pupils' time under their control is spent productively, something obviously not the case.

Granholt should do the right thing

One of the most curious political events of the new century in Michigan is how Gov. Jennifer Granholm seems to have managed to totally misconstrue a key part of the proposed job-creation package of bills.

They were put together during months of debate involving the House, the Senate and the governor's office. There was much discussion, innovation and compromise in blending proposals from the Democratic governor and Republican-dominated Legislature.

But no sooner had the negotiations been concluded to the presumed satisfaction of all concerned, than Granholm said she'd been misled and might veto the vital legislation. She said she didn't know the Single Business Tax still would be scheduled to expire in 2009. That's hard to believe, assuming she was as involved in the debate as presumed to be. For it to have been extended or replaced, she'd have had to know.

Passage of the jobs bills and her signature are vital now for their hoped-for, immediate benefits. Debate over the fate of the SBT will be lengthy and contentious and had no place in the crafting of the jobs legislation.

Let's hope Granholm has misunderstood and will do the right thing by signing the bills when she gets them.

THE OAKLAND PRESS

GOOD MORNING

Mike Cox and Geoffrey Fieger - what a pair.

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THE DAILY OAKLAND PRESS

It may be time to get tougher

EDITORIAL

As if Oakland County educators didn't have enough to worry about, now it's the growing support for a mandated, statewide high school curriculum that stresses math, science and the English language.

It's not that they are opposed to the emphasis on these core subjects, they are concerned about its effect. For every additional credit mandated in one of these subjects, they see less participation in elective subjects such as the arts, humanities, career-technical courses and athletics.

As one educator said this week in The Oakland Press, "There needs to be enough room for kids to explore their interests."

There's no arguing that, just like there is no arguing with the evidence supporting the change.

The consideration of tougher standards stems from a study that shows state high schools have widely varied graduation requirements in core subjects. For example, of the surveyed schools, only one-third require algebra. Currently, the state only requires that students take one civics and one health course - other requirements are local decisions.

Then there's the question: Just what kind of education are our children getting?

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about onethird of the nation's college-bound high school students have to be placed in remedial language and math classes. In Michigan, state universities and colleges spend some \$600 million annually to teach students what they didn't learn in high school.

And these are the students with the grades and drive to attend college. What about those whose future doesn't include higher education? What kind of basic skills are they leaving high school with?

Something isn't working now for a lot of Michigan public school students. State legislators and school officials need to take an honest look at a tougher high school curriculum.

Five reasons to be proud of our schools

Yes there are problems with our schools, but there's also a lot that's just great.

Five good examples are Frederic Sala of Troy High School; Julia Rudolf, Rochester Adams; Evan Kangas, Royal Oak Dondero; Vivek Behera, Birmingham Detroit Country Day; and Chris Pugliese, Detroit Catholic Central in Novi.

All five aced their ACT college entrance exams with a perfect score of 36. They were among only 82 students nationally to accomplish that feat, 11 of whom were from Michigan. Across the country some 365,000 students took the test last June and the average test result is 20.9.

There certainly is plenty to be proud of when it comes to our schools.

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http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/102205/opi_2005102205.shtml

State should expand mandated public school requirements

Michigan parents must have been shocked to learn that the state's 500-plus school districts are on their own when it comes to graduation requirements. The only course mandated by the state is civics. Nearly 20 percent of the districts require only a high school course in algebra when it comes mathematics. Fewer than 300 demand four years of math at that level. The information is from a Michigan Department of Education survey. It speaks volumes that the department had to ask to discover what's going on academically in our schools. We hear a lot about grade-point averages and that they should improve in Michigan. We pay plenty of attention to Michigan Education Assessment Program test rankings. And there is always plenty of ballyhoo about blue ribbon certification and accreditation of schools. But officials hadn't, until now, thought to ask about the subject matter taught our students.

Perhaps that explains earlier reports that only about a third of the state's graduates are prepared academically to attend college.

Elected leaders in Lansing and elsewhere talk about the high-tech jobs we need to lure to the state, jobs upon which our economic future depends. But how can we make certain our students are prepared for those jobs when the only course the state says they must take is civics?

What are local school boards thinking? We've long lived in a state in which high-paying auto industry jobs were plentiful and required little but the ability to learn a simple task. Two decades ago a General Motors vice president, William Hoglund, felt compelled to announce publicly that only high school graduates need apply.

But those days are long gone. Why did it take state officials so long to realize that the only required course for a high school diploma is a civics course? Why are we always playing catch-up when it comes to educating our children for the future?

The economic lessons that have hammered Michigan have not been heeded.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm, after reviewing the survey, announced that Michigan needs to mandate minimum subject requirements. She's right.

We need to raise the bar, and keep raising it.

Granholm should quickly convene a panel of education and economic experts to help determine additional minimum state standards for high school diplomas.

Local control, an issue school district officials raise when another entity dares suggest they do more, can only take us so far. If school districts want to exceed future state-mandated minimums, they can do so.

Michigan, which spends more tax dollars on education than on anything else, hasn't been getting its money's worth.

HOUGHTON, MI

THE DAILY MINING GAZETTE - www.mininggazette.com

Tuesday, November 01, 2005 — 11:56:41 AM EST

It all starts with thorough school prep

What does having a high school diploma mean these days? Fifty years ago, it was a ticket to a good-paying job in a variety of fields, but it was not considered a necessity.

Fast forward a few decades and we see the economy of the United States made it necessary for everyone to have a high school diploma if they were even going to get an entry-level position or a slot in the military. Today, a high school diploma is simply one step (certainly not the final one) in the educational process and guarantees those who possess such a document absolutely nothing.

Houghton-Portage Township Schools High School Principal Kass Simila recently gave a presentation to the school board about a report showing just how little confidence, some people, especially college professors, have in the traditional high school diploma.

Known as the America Diploma Project, the report revealed that a majority of high school graduates pursue remedial coursework once they get to college. Remedial classes get students to a level where they can handle college coursework. These classes do not count towards the student's degree but cost the same per credit hour as college coursework.

The good news is that most of Houghton High School's students do not require such classes.

The report begs the question what does a high school diploma mean these days. We can think of few jobs that pay living wages that require only a diploma. A diploma is no guarantee to a prospective employer or college that its holder has mastered the basic skills of reading, writing, math and science at a twelfth-grade level.

According to the report, colleges educators surveyed said the number one problem they are facing is a lack of student preparation. They cite a lack of student effort in high school as the reason for this deficiency.

This report shows that Americans need to rethink what role high school should play in a person's educational path. Parents must be an active participant in their child's education, encouraging them to take the tough classes. School districts must beef up their requirements for graduation, including four years of science, math, English and social sciences. Districts should also look at expanding and improving vocational and technical education because everyone is not cut out for college.

We realize budgets are tight, but we are sacrificing the country's future if our children are not prepared to take a leadership role in developing tomorrow's economy.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Curriculum mandates should be considered

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

For generations, local school districts have controlled their own curriculum.

Some districts in affluent communities developed rigorous courses of study designed to prepare their students for top-tier colleges. Some districts in blue-collar or rural communities tailored curricula to practical, but perhaps less-rigorous, standards.

In districts with high poverty levels and high drop-out rates, programs are often geared toward life skills and keeping kids in school until they graduate.

Local school boards have always wanted the ability to design their courses of study around the needs of the kinds of students they serve.

Often, school boards do a good job, especially when they have adequate resources to offer a variety of programs to the varying needs of students.

But sometimes that has meant lowering standards to keep the lowest-performing students from quitting.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has been campaigning for higher curriculum requirements in public high schools, wanting to increase the number of years of English, math, science and social studies.

Are mandates like those necessary?

A look at a study conducted by the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals suggest they might be.

The results of a survey of local districts' curriculum requirements were surprising for how meager standards are in some districts. Of the 293 districts that responded to the survey, only 14 required four years of math, Gongwer News Service reported last week. At least three years of math were required by another 124 districts. Ninety-five school districts required students to take only the lowest level of algebra. Forty-four school districts did not even require that.

Year after year, students in the United States have been outpaced by their counterparts in other nations, according to international tests. That's despite the fact that Americans spend more money on education than most other nations.

A global economy makes the need for tougher courses of study, especially in math and science, more urgent than ever. Michigan students will be competing against better-educated people who will be happy to work for less money.

To regain our competitiveness, is it better to ask Michigan workers to work for less? Or should we improve our competitiveness by having the best-educated workforce?

Educators are already voicing objection to the proposal. Some are saying that more mandated classes will mean fewer electives, especially for students who aren't college bound and seek career training in high

school. Marginal students are apt to drop out even sooner, say others.

If the state does indeed try to impose a curriculum on Michigan high schools, it should offer enough flexibility to meet the needs of all its students. Instead of requiring all seniors to pass two years of algebra, a year of geometry and a year of calculus, for example, an alternate four-year math program might be based on life skills and career training.

Many school districts already offer their students excellent curricula.

But some school districts are shortchanging their students.

Given that disparity, toughening educational standards in Michigan sounds like the right idea.

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STATE LOOKS TO BOOST ACADEMIC COURSES FOR GRADUATION

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

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For many Michigan high school students, geometry is their last math class in high school and maybe forever.

The class will have fulfilled their graduation requirement for math, and they have no inclination to go further.

In the eyes of people such as Gov. Jennifer Granholm and Jim Ballard, executive director of the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, that stance underscores why Michigan needs a mandated, rigorous high school curriculum.

Currently, state law requires only that students take one semester of government and one semester of health. At the very least, Ballard says, the state should mandate four years of English and a math curriculum that takes students through Algebra II.

Lt. Gov. John Cherry's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth is pushing the standards urged by the Presidents Council of the State Universities of Michigan, which would be four years each of math, science, English and social studies.

A recent survey of Michigan public high schools by the state Department of Education indicates that the average school requires four years of English, three years each of math and social studies and two years of science.

"Studies show that less than 20 percent of students who go on to college have completed the recommended curriculum for college-bound students," Ballard says. "About 23 percent of students entering Michigan State (University) have to take remedial math, and 95 percent of those are kids who have not taken math beyond sophomore year.

"We need to raise our expectations about the courses that our students need to take. ... Right now, we're not doing them any favors, and the research is very clear on that."

But calls for mandated curriculum worry many high school educators, who fear it will be too rigid, undermining electives that can keep some children in school and resulting in unintended consequences, such as raising the dropout rate or actually weakening the curriculum.

"Do Michigan high schools need more academic rigor? Do we need to turn up the heat a bit? Yes," said Tim Staffen, principal of Constantine High School.

But the United States is unique in that education is considered a right rather than a privilege, he said, and many countries maintain their strict standards "by adopting the principle of love it or leave. We have No Child Left Behind. It's a different philosophy."

A mandatory curriculum "is a good idea, but everything has a price," said John Kolassa, principal of Schoolcraft High School. "You can't add something without taking something away. And if you add more requirements to the core, then the electives are going to go away."

"Would building trades have to go? I don't know. Would computer education have to go? I don't know. ... There are only so many classes that students can take."

Plus, Kolassa said, "what may happen is that you'd have to water down the curriculum just to meet the mandates," so that Algebra II is no longer the Algebra II class that is taught today.

Candace Ross, a counselor at Paw Paw High School, is among those particularly concerned about what effect a mandatory curriculum would have in career-training programs.

"What they are totally, totally, totally missing is the whole technical-education side," Ross said. "What's going to happen to those students? ... I would be scared that we would lose a lot of kids" if the state required four years of study in each of the four academic areas.

She points to the success of the Van Buren Technology Center in Lawrence, which serves 1,100 high school students in more than two dozen career-oriented programs from cosmetology to computer networking. Sam Accorso, one of the program's administrators, says the program relies on the ability of students to spend part of their school day at the center, and a more rigid curriculum could hinder that. He also questioned whether regular high schools would have the science labs and the teachers to accommodate a dramatic change in curriculum.

"We're talking about a fundamental shift in the way that schools do business," Accorso said. "Sometimes what the Legislature sees as a clean solution causes unexpected results."

Ballard says many educators "are hearing horror stories of what might happen." He said the actual changes are likely to focus on English and math rather than all four academic core subjects, adding that it's probable that classes in job-training programs could help satisfy math and English requirements.

But he also said Michigan has no option but to take a hard look at its high school curriculum, keeping in mind the state's changing economy. He maintains that years of lenient graduation standards haven't stemmed the dropout rate and have lulled many high school students and their parents into a false sense of security about their education.

"We were trying to be nice and we screwed up," Ballard said.

"We have got to do the right thing. A high school diploma now is a ticket to nowhere. ... We want our kids to be able to earn a middle-class living. That's what this debate is about."

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Monday, May 16, 2005

School challenging?

The time high school students spend preparing for class:

Hours per week	Percentage of respondents by school track				
	General	Special Ed	College	Vocational	All
0	11%	26%	4%	18%	10%
1-3	50	46	33	53	45
4-6	23	14	27	19	24
7-10	10	6	18	7	12
11-14	3	3	9	2	5
15-plus	3	5	10	2	5

*Numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: High School Survey of Student Engagement

The Detroit News

High School Standards Are Way Too Low

New survey finds students get top grades without having to do much homework

The Detroit News

Answers to why fewer than one-third of Michigan's high school students graduate prepared to succeed in college can be found in a new national survey.

A majority of American high-schoolers spend less than three hours a week on homework, and yet they still manage to get good grades, according to the study by Indiana University.

That could suggest that our children are so bright they can achieve top results without hitting the books. But a raft of recent studies showing American students are slipping in math, science and other key subjects compared to students in other countries indicate that U.S. schools are rewarding children for lackluster work and not challenging them to reach their full potential.

Parents are equally complicit; they are reluctant to push their children to excel, accept school curriculums that are skimpy on the tough subjects like advanced math and science, and bristle at teachers when their children bring home bad grades.

With China and India aggressively chasing the best technology jobs, students in the United States still see school as a social and athletic experience, rather than an academic one.

Barely more than half of all students say they put a great deal of effort into schoolwork, according to the Indiana survey. Fifty-five percent of students say they put in less than three hours a week preparing for class, yet two-thirds of these say their report cards are filled with As and Bs.

Even those students who intend to go to college are slacking off, with just 37 percent spending an hour a day on homework.

Seniors post the worst results, according to the survey. Just 11 percent of them did an hour's worth of homework a day, raising legitimate questions about whether the 12th year of school should be scrapped, as some in Michigan propose.

As much as anything else, this is a cultural issue. American parents have stopped demanding excellence from their children, turning instead to ill-defined goals like "happiness" to gauge their success.

That was evidenced in the most recent Your Child survey of Michigan's attitudes about education,

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published two weeks ago in The Detroit News. Sixty percent of parents defined success for their children without mentioning education.

Microsoft founder Bill Gates has declared American high schools obsolete for preparing students for the new world economy.

But it's not the structure that's outdated. The true problem is the erosion of standards, both in the schools and in the homes.

The old model of K-12 schools would work just fine if higher expectations were placed on students by both educators and parents.

That most kids can get through high school with good grades and less than a half-hour of homework a day is confirmation that the expectations are far too low.

Gongwer Aug. 10, 2005

ACHIEVE PUSHES MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL STANDARDS

Michigan needs to join other states in requiring high school students to take minimum levels of courses to graduate if it wants to keep up with international education and job trends, Matt Gandal, executive vice president of Achieve Incorporated, told the State Board of Education.

Mr. Gandal showed the board at its Tuesday meeting that Michigan was at or just above the national average in such things as high school and college graduation rate and below the national average in 9th graders making it to graduation with a college-ready education. That, combined with the growing demand by business for college or trade school education beyond high school, could leave Michigan further behind in its economic development efforts.

Governor Jennifer Granholm has signed Michigan on to Achieve's American Diploma Project Network, which is aimed at increasing college graduation rates by helping states better prepare their students for further studies. Mr. Gandal, who came before the board as part of its ongoing discussions on reshaping high schools in the state, renewed Achieve's offer to assist the state in its efforts to redesign its high school programs.

"There's a great opportunity to do something about this," he said of Michigan's current lack of high school course or graduation requirements.

Mr. Gandal acknowledged concerns that Michigan has previously left graduation requirements to local school districts, with board members noting a previous attempt to set a statewide curriculum was repealed under pressure from schools before it could be implemented.

"One of the things that will come up if you start looking at this is we like leaving it up to local school districts and most are doing college level requirements," he said.

But he said data indicated few districts nationally, and few states with required curriculum or exit exams, are providing the level of education required for college or the workforce. He noted, for instance, that six of the states with required graduation tests require math and English skills at only about 8th grade by international standards.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan said the state is working with secondary school principals to collect information on their graduation requirements. "I was a local superintendent and we weren't there," he said of having graduation requirements that ensured students were prepared for higher education.

Mr. Gandal said a focus on preparing students for higher education was not improper because even those going directly into the workforce will be expected to have the same skills as those going on to further education. "There's a great convergence in what it

takes to be successful in college and what it takes to be successful in the workplace,” he said.

Achieve is currently working on tools schools would be able to use to measure whether their curriculum is preparing students for college, he said.

Mr. Gandal said Michigan had one mark in its favor: “You’re already ahead of the curve with the Merit exam, at least with the concept of it,” he said. “If the exam is used (by colleges and employers), students will take it more seriously, parents will take it more seriously.”

The Department of Education is currently working on standards for the new Michigan Merit Exam, which is required to include a college entrance exam. But Mr. Gandal said a preferable system would be to also include college placement measures in the test.

“I believe you’ve got to see the post-secondary community making decisions based on these exams or you’ll lose traction,” he said.

Mr. Gandal said Achieve is also working to help states with what he said would be the toughest sell on a statewide curriculum and test: parents. “That’s not always an easy argument for a parent or a kid that you need to do this to turn the economy around,” he said.

MEETINGS: The board has planned another special meeting, for October 5, to discuss high school reforms.

The board also moved its regular October and November meetings back to Lansing given the completion of the Capitol Loop that had made it difficult for the public to get to the Hannah Building where the board usually meets.



Everything Michigan

Proposal doesn't bother teachers

Monday, September 19, 2005 By Jessi De La Cruz

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Local high school educators say they don't see a problem with a proposal to raise Michigan's high school graduation requirements because most students do more than what is mandatory anyway.

Most Jackson-area high schools already require students to take two or three years each of science, math, English and social studies. State law mandating four years each of those core subjects wouldn't be a major change from today's rules, educators say.

"The fourth year wouldn't really matter," said Hanover-Horton High School principal Rod Hardy, whose school requires students to take at least three years of each core subject. "Most of them are doing that anyway."

Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who is pushing this initiative, says it's a necessary move for students to remain competitive in the state's economic future. Currently, students need only complete one semester in civics and government and one semester in health, according to state law.

But most schools statewide have long surpassed the meager state graduation requirements to prepare students for life after high school.

Grass Lake High School principal Kathleen Pecora said the only downside to the plan is that some students who are already struggling may do worse under more stringent graduation requirements. However, many of this small percentage of students have absenteeism problems well before they fail a class, she said.

"We really make it a priority to help the students who need help," Pecora said.

Columbia High School raised the stakes for freshmen this year by requiring another year of math, science and language arts.

Students in the Class of 2009 also will be the first to graduate under the mandate of earning 25 credits instead of 24 credits in four years.

Principal David Slusher said there hasn't been much fuss about the raised requirements.

"Kids seem to rise to the expectations," Slusher said. "If the state is going to expect us to perform at a certain level on testing, we have to give (students) what they need."

Granholm asked the state Board of Education for course recommendations by Nov. 15.

Despite her concerns about low-performing students adapting to the tougher standards, Pecora said she welcomes the idea of state mandates for high school graduation.

"It's time for the state to step in and do this," Pecora said. "This has been ignored for a long time."

-- Booth Newspapers contributed to this report.

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Everything Michigan

High school reform efforts begin in Michigan

8/7/2005, 8:15 a.m. ET

By TIM MARTIN
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Howell Public Schools Superintendent Chuck Breiner envisions a day when Michigan's high schools have flexible schedules that provide classes late into the evening.

Schools would have fewer students so teachers could pay more attention to each one. Instruction would be more practical, with hands-on experience supplementing traditional textbooks.

The future already is taking shape in Howell, a growing Livingston County district that is building a second high school and making other changes to be on the cutting edge of reform. The movement is gaining momentum nationwide as the United States seeks to improve its economic competitiveness and improve student performance in writing, math and science.

"If we were to mine the data we have available on how we are doing, I think we'd find we're not doing very well," Breiner said of high school performance across the country. "Nationally, high schools are lagging."

The Michigan Department of Education has hired a high school redesign consultant to help address possible areas of reform, including teacher development and student testing.

The process will be aided by a National Governors Association grant, paid for by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, that will bring Michigan up to \$1.8 million over a two-year period. Michigan was one of 10 states to receive a grant.

The state may consider tougher curriculum standards for high school students across Michigan. Revamped testing policies already are in the works to better gauge what students learn and how well they are prepared for college and employment.

One of the biggest changes comes in the 2006-07 academic year, when the current high school Michigan Educational Assessment Program test is dumped in favor of a test based on a college entrance exam.

But turning around Michigan's high schools likely will be a slow, difficult process.

Politicians, business leaders and educators say it must happen because the world has changed and schools must change with it to better prepare students for the job market. Michigan won't attract jobs of the future if it can't provide an adequately trained work force, they say.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has said the state must double the number of college graduates in the next decade to remain economically competitive. Michigan ranks 36th among the states with about one-quarter of its population aged 25 or older with at least a bachelor's degree, according to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The national average is 27.6 percent, and the most educated states — Massachusetts,

Colorado, New Hampshire and Maryland — have rates exceeding 35 percent.

"This is a historic time for us," said Mike Flanagan, Michigan's K-12 schools chief. "We are either going to make it or break it in the next few years, on our watch."

The success of reform could hinge on early models that some Michigan districts are undertaking on their own.

Battle Creek Central High School launches an aggressive reform this fall. The 1,800-student school will be reshaped into subdivisions, or "communities," of up to 350 students each.

The goal is to give students a better chance to make personal connections with a teacher or staff member, preventing students from falling through the cracks of a large, impersonal system.

Teachers also will be split up among the smaller groups, and each teacher will be assigned to 10-15 students as a "family advocate."

Howell High School, with about 2,600 students in grades 9-12, is one of the largest in the state. The district already is part of a pilot program, supported by Michigan business leaders, to encourage students to tackle a tougher curriculum.

The district plans to open a second high school in 2007, reducing the number of students in each building and improving the chances of personal connections.

Howell already offers some alternative scheduling for high school students. But a second building could help expand those offerings, said Breiner, who wants buildings open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. to maximize their potential and afford the most students a chance to attend classes.

Today's traditional high school schedule — starting early in the morning and ending around 3 p.m., with summers off — was established decades ago when the U.S. population was dominated by farming families and child labor was a crucial part of the economy. That schedule may not make the most sense today.

Neither may the tightly regimented, one-hour class structure that has dominated for decades, Breiner said. Students may learn better if instruction relied more on individual responsibility and interactive technology than lectures and textbooks.

"We dispense secondary education in a way that ignores how many students learn," Breiner said. "The traditional way doesn't work for a lot of students."

With that in mind, Dearborn Virtual Academy mixes up its schedule. Students are required to take a few online courses and perform community service along with their more traditional classes.

"This effort is just beginning," state Board of Education President Kathleen Straus said of the reforms. "We don't have all the answers yet."

On the Net:

Michigan Department of Education: <http://www.michigan.gov/mde>

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